

CIA Sets a Trap To Catch a Pest

In the 16 years since he seized power in Libya, Muammar Qadhafi has tried to spite Washington at every turn, all the while accusing the Central Intelligence Agency of plotting to overthrow him. For once, he may be right. The *Washington Post* on Novem-



Libyan dictator Muammar Qadhafi.

ber 3 published leaked information that the CIA, with the blessing of the White House and the knowledge of congressional leaders, had drawn up detailed plans to mousetrap Qadhafi into a foreign adventure that would topple him from power at home.

To muted cheers, the administration refused to confirm or deny the existence of such a plan—and President Reagan promptly ordered a full-scale investigation to plug the leak.

Said Reagan of Qadhafi: "We don't have a very personal relationship." From the Libyan dictator came a bellow of outrage: The scheme was "more dangerous and more scandalous than Watergate" and Reagan "should be tried."

The purported CIA plan was built around Qadhafi's support of foreign terrorist groups from Northern Ireland to the Philippines. With the aid of a sympathetic third country, Qadhafi was to be tempted into a foreign adventure that would be orchestrated to fail. That in theory would give his foes in the Libyan Army the chance they need to move against him.

Could such a maneuver actually work? Experts said it played on Qadhafi's known taste for stirring up trouble, but they noted that he has survived numerous coup attempts and assassination plots.

Another question in the minds of some members of Congress briefed on the scheme: How do you overthrow the Libyan dictator without getting him killed, which would violate an executive order that flatly forbids government involvement in assassinations?

Even if those questions were resolved to the satisfaction of all, the CIA plan had a new flaw: Having learned of the trap beneath the cheese, Qadhafi was not likely to reach for the bait. □